



1) Opening prayer

Lord,
increase our eagerness to do your will
and help us to know the saving power of your love.
You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel reading - Luke 21,20-28

Jesus said to his disciples: 'When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then you must realise that it will soon be laid desolate. Then those in Judaea must escape to the mountains, those inside the city must leave it, and those in country districts must not take refuge in it. For this is the time of retribution when all that scripture says must be fulfilled. Alas for those with child, or with babies at the breast, when those days come! 'For great misery will descend on the land and retribution on this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive to every gentile country; and Jerusalem will be trampled down by the gentiles until their time is complete.

'There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars; on earth nations in agony, bewildered by the turmoil of the ocean and its waves; men fainting away with terror and fear at what menaces the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.

When these things begin to take place, stand erect, hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand.'

3) Reflection

- In today's Gospel we have the continuation of the Apocalyptic Discourse which gives two signs, the 7th and the 8th, which should take place before the end of time or better before the coming of the end of this world in order to give place to the new world, to the "new Heavens and the New Earth" (Is 65, 17). The seventh sign is the destruction of Jerusalem and the eighth is the upsetting of the old creation.

- Luke 21, 20-24. The seventh sign: the destruction of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was for them the Eternal City. And now it was destroyed! How can this fact be explained? Is it possible that God is not aware of this? It is difficult for us to imagine the trauma and the crisis of faith that the destruction of Jerusalem caused in the communities both of the Jews and of the Christians. Here it is possible to make an observation on the composition of the Gospel of Luke and of Mark. Luke writes in the year 85. He uses the Gospel of Mark to compose his narrative on Jesus. Mark writes in the year 70, the same year in which Jerusalem was surrounded and destroyed by the Roman armies. This is

why Mark writes giving an indication to the reader: "When you see the appalling abomination set up where it ought not to be – (and here he opens a parenthesis and says) "let the reader understand!" (he closes the parenthesis) - then those in Judaea must escape to the mountains" (Mk 13, 14). When Luke mentions the destruction of Jerusalem, for the past fifteen years Jerusalem was in ruins. This is why he omits the parenthesis of Mark and Luke says: "When you will see Jerusalem surrounded by the army, then you must realize that it will soon be laid desolate. Then those in Judaea must escape to the mountains, those inside the city must leave it, and those in country districts must not take refuge in it; for this is the time of retribution when all that Scripture says must be fulfilled. Alas for those with child, or with babies at the breast, when those days come. For great misery will descend on the land and retribution on this people. They will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive to every gentile country; and Jerusalem will be trampled down by gentiles until their time is complete". Hearing Jesus who announces persecution (6th sign) and the destruction of Jerusalem (7th sign), the readers of the persecuted communities in the time of Luke concluded saying: "This is our day! We are in the 6th and 7th signs!"

- Luke 21, 25-26: The eighth sign: changes in the sun and in the moon. When will the end come? At the end, after having spoken about all these signs which had already been realized, there was still the following question: "God's project is very much advanced and the stages foreseen by Jesus are already being realized. We are in the sixth and the seventh stages, how many stages or signs are still lacking until the end arrives? Is there much lacking?" The response is now given in the 8th sign: "There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and on earth nations in agony, bewildered by the turmoil of the ocean and its waves; men fainting away with terror and fear at what menaces the world, for the powers of heaven will be shaken". The 8th sign is different from the other signs. The signs in heaven and on earth are an indication of what is taking place, at the same time, at the end of the old world, of the ancient creation, it is the beginning of the coming of the new Heaven and the new earth. When the shell of the egg begins to crack it is a sign that the novelty is about to appear. It is the coming of a New World which is provoking the disintegration of the ancient world. Conclusion: very little is lacking! The Kingdom of God is arriving already!

- Luke 21, 27-28: The coming of the Kingdom of God and the appearance of the Son of Man. "Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand erect; hold your heads high, because your liberation is near at hand". In this announcement, Jesus describes the coming of the Kingdom with images taken from the prophecy of Daniel (Dn 7, 1-14). Daniel says that, after the misfortunes caused by the kingdoms of this world, the Kingdom of God will come. The kingdoms of this world, all of them, had the figure of an animal: lion, panther, bear, and ferocious beast (Dn 7, 3-7). These are animal signs which dehumanize life, like it happens with the neo-liberal kingdom, today! The Kingdom of God then appears with the aspect of the Son of Man, that is, with a human aspect (Dn 7, 13). It is a human kingdom. To construct this kingdom which humanizes is the task of the persons of the community. It is the new history that we have to take to fulfilment and which brings

together people from the four corners of the earth. The title Son of Man is the name that Jesus liked to use. In the four Gospels this name appears more than 80 times (eighty)! Any pain which we bear from now, any struggle in behalf of life, any persecution for the sake of justice, any birth pangs, are a seed of the Kingdom which will come in the 8th sign.

4) Personal questions

- Persecution of the communities, destruction of Jerusalem. Lack of hope. Before the events which today make people suffer, do I despair? Which is the source of my hope?
- Son of Man is the title which Jesus liked to use. He wants to humanize life. The more human it is the more divine as Pope Leo the Great said. Am I human in my relationships with others? Do I humanize?

5) Concluding prayer

For Yahweh is good,
his faithful love is everlasting,
his constancy from age to age. (Ps 100,5)